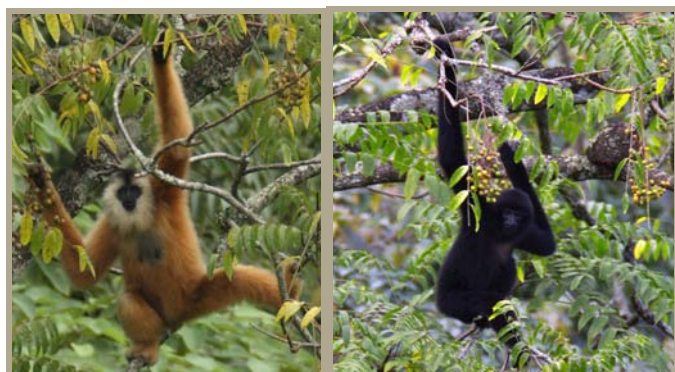




Transboundary Cao Vit Gibbon Conservation Project

Cao Bang Province, Vietnam & Guangxi Province, China



Female and male cao vit gibbons
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A community-based primate conservation project implemented by Fauna & Flora International (FFI) in Vietnam and China with support from Cao Bang Forest Protection Department and Guangxi Forestry Bureau

Aim of the project

Long-term conservation of the **critically endangered cao vit gibbon** (*Nomascus nasutus*)

Project objectives

1. Protection of the gibbon population and its habitat
2. Support to local communities to reduce their dependency on forest resources and improve their livelihoods
3. Further understanding of gibbon ecology through scientific research
4. Raising awareness among stakeholders about the cao vit gibbon and the importance of its conservation
5. Rehabilitation of the habitat of the cao vit gibbon
6. International transboundary cooperation for conservation

Project background

The cao vit gibbon *Nomascus nasutus*, also known as the eastern black crested gibbon, is the rarest ape in the world after its closest relative the Hainan gibbon. Its historical distribution lies east of the Red River in Vietnam and southern China.

In 2002, FFI biologists were able to confirm the presence of at least 26 cao vit gibbons in a limestone mountainous forest in Trung Khanh District, Cao Bang Province in Vietnam, on the border with China. Interview data and field surveys suggested that the species has been extirpated everywhere else within its historical range in Vietnam. In 2006, a further three groups were discovered in contiguous forest in China.

A transboundary census organised by FFI in September 2007 brings the current estimate of individuals to about 110 individuals in 18 family groups. This is the only location in the world where this species is known to exist.

A lack of suitable habitat is the most significant immediate threats to these gibbons. This threat is further compounded by habitat degradation mainly from fuel-wood collection and free grazing livestock. While hunting by local people no longer represents a threat, outsiders occasionally make illegal incursions into the area for hunting. No gibbons have been hunted since the beginning of project activities.

The limestone forest has also other important representative habitats and species of the northeastern Vietnam and southern China karst. It includes threatened orchid and conifer species, giant flying squirrels, southern serow, Asiatic black bear, musk deer and silver pheasants.

Project achievements

1. Immediate on the ground protection through the establishment and training of community patrol groups
2. Establishment of the Cao Vit Gibbon Conservation Area in Vietnam.
3. Support to local communities to reduce extraction of fuel-wood particularly through constructing over 500 fuel-efficient stoves and biogas plants
4. Raised awareness and pride among local communities concerning the gibbon
5. Conservation-oriented planning with key villages
6. Establishment of an ecological research programme
7. The first transboundary census confirming the population is beginning to recover
8. Visits of government officials to meet their respective counterparts across the international border and opening dialogue on transboundary cooperation



Location of the project in north east Vietnam and southern China



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Summary of activities

Since the discovery of the gibbon population, FFI has been working with local government forestry agencies to reduce immediate threats to the gibbon population.

Protection

The first response to the discovery of the gibbons was to provide some level of immediate protection in the forest. In Vietnam, a preliminary core protection zone was soon agreed upon by local authorities and conservation agreements were signed by local households. A community patrol group was established comprising five local people and a border guard. In China, a local nature reserve took responsibility for protecting the forest, with support from four community patrollers.

Establishing protected areas

In Vietnam, biodiversity surveys, socio-economic surveys and stakeholder consultations were conducted in 2005 and 2006, leading to the preparation and approval of an investment plan for the Cao Vit Gibbon Conservation Area at the end of 2006. The protected area covers over 1,600 hectares and lies adjacent to the Chinese border. A management board was established in April 2007, comprised of a director and three forest rangers as well as the community patrol group. In 2008, FFI China has been supporting the Guangxi Forestry Bureau in the process of establishing a protected area by facilitating participatory planning among local villages.

Conservation awareness-raising

Awareness-raising among local communities about the importance of the gibbon and measures to protect it remains an important ongoing activity. Awareness and pride is high among the local communities about the importance of the cao vit gibbon. Other awareness-raising activities include working with local schools and distribution of project calendars to all households, but most importantly engagement of local people in project activities.

Fuel-wood reduction

Reducing levels of fuel-wood extraction has been a main focus of project activities in Vietnam. Twenty-two domestic biogas plants have been constructed that use livestock manure, usually from pigs, to generate gas for cooking. Over 500 fuel-efficient stoves have been constructed in the two communes. These simple stoves are cheap and easy to construct and are estimated to reduce fuelwood use between 40 and 60%. Fuel-wood plantations have also been established using a local tree species to provide an alternative source of fuel-wood and there is now strong interest in replicating the idea in villages on the Chinese side of the border.



Fuel-efficient cooking stove supported by the project

Cooperation with local communities

The local villages are generally poor. Participatory resource use planning was undertaken in the Vietnamese communes to develop plans that support development while reducing impacts on the forest. This led to five villages becoming the focus for closer and more integrated cooperation. Village development planning identified development needs and areas where the project could support while maintaining its conservation focus. As a result, the key issue is now controlling livestock grazing to reduce its impact on both protected area and village forests. Elephant grass has been successfully introduced to these villages for cattle fodder, and the model is now being taken up and replicated throughout the district.

Ecological research

Knowledge of the gibbon's feeding and behavioural ecology is crucial for improving understanding of the species' habitat requirements – and thereby for securing its long-term survival. Monthly vegetation surveying and monitoring has been a key component of research activities lead by students from Hanoi and Dali Universities.

Transboundary cooperation

Since 2007, FFI has been developing cross-border activities. A major milestone of the project was the first transboundary census covering the entire area of viable habitat for the gibbon in contiguous habitat in Vietnam and China. Since 2008 closer links are being established between government partners and project planning of FFI is integrated between the two country programmes.

Acknowledgements

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